



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

S/S - 8601

June 12, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. HENRY A. KISSINGER
THE WHITE HOUSE

Subject: Wheelus Air Force Base Closure

Enclosed is a copy of an information memorandum to the Secretary prepared by the bureau of African Affairs.

Theodore L. Eliot Jr.

Theodore L. Eliot, Jr.
Executive Secretary

Enclosure:

As stated.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

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SUBJECT: Wheelus Air Force Base Closure - INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

On June 11 the U.S. formally turned over Wheelus Air Force Base to the Libyan Government after an uninterrupted U.S. presence there since World War II. Following a simple ceremony that was attended by Acting Prime Minister Jaluud and Ambassador Palmer, the Wheelus Commander transferred command to the Libyan Air Force and the last 48 USAF personnel remaining at Wheelus departed for Germany.

Under the Wheelus Agreement all permanent constructions reverted to the Libyan Government without compensation. This property cost \$77 million at initial construction and is currently valued at \$43 million after depreciation. During the withdrawal the USAF removed to other USAF installations equipment valued at \$21 million and sold about \$900,000 worth of non-critical equipment and \$750,000 worth of aircraft fuel to the Libyan Government for which full payment has been received. Over 4,000 airmen and dependents were also withdrawn. Previous Wheelus functions (as a weapons and gunnery training facility for USAF Europe-based tactical aircraft) have now been transferred to bases in Europe, chiefly in Spain and Turkey.

The LARG has apparently renamed Wheelus "Ukba ibn Nafia", after the 7th century Arab conqueror of North Africa (who also expelled the Christians from there). The LARG has not revealed its intended use of Wheelus other than to declare that it will be used "to defend Arabism and humanity". It has repeatedly denied that it would allow control of former U.S. and U.K. bases to pass to "foreigners".

C [REDACTED]

Group-3

Downgraded at 12-year intervals,
not automatically declassified.

The Libyan Air Force still maintains its headquarters at Wheelus and we expect that French technicians may work there in connection with the new Mirage deliveries expected later in 1970.

The Wheelus withdrawal has been accomplished over the last six months with full Libyan cooperation. The event itself passed without incident or significant adverse publicity in Libya or the Middle East. The LARG is, however, planning ten days of celebrations later in the month and the possibility exists that delegations from other Arab countries, notably the UAR and Sudan, will be invited to participate. Negotiations between the Libyans and ourselves are scheduled to begin June 13, on a series of complicated issues connected with our withdrawal from Wheelus. These include termination of the Wheelus Base Agreement, the Economic Assistance Agreement (under which we paid for use of Wheelus) and possibly of the termination at LARG request of our MAAG Agreement.

[REDACTED]